# THE RECOVERY KERNEL

## The Playwright Scripts

*Seven complete plays. 15 minutes each. Minimum 3 parts. Maximum honesty.*

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### How to Use These Scripts

Each script is a complete play written for a Kernel meeting's 20-minute playwright block. The scripts are written to be performed without rehearsal — the stage directions are simple, the dialogue is accessible, and the roles are designed so that anyone in the room can play any part.

These are not polished theater. They are enacted recovery. The imperfections in performance — the missed cue, the laughed line, the person who breaks character because something hit too close — those are not failures. They are the play working.

Every play has a debrief section. Use it. The performance without the debrief is catharsis without integration. The debrief is where the pottery gets its glaze.

| Play | Theme |
|---|---|
| 1 — The Last Conversation | Two versions of the same person across time — the conversation that couldn't happen, finally happening |
| 2 — The Job Interview | Applying for the life you want with questions nobody ever asks — and references from your past |
| 3 — The Museum of Choices | Every exhibit is a decision. The guide explains without judgment. You choose what to take home. |
| 4 — The Party | Everyone playing who they used to be. One person arrives as who they are now. |
| 5 — The Handoff | Two strangers. The same object. Completely different meanings. A trade. |
| 6 — The Verdict | A full trial with a public defender who is technically there but obviously isn't |
| 7 — The Letter | You write to the substance. It writes back. What it says is not what you expected. |

PLAY 1

# The Last Conversation

*Two versions of the same person — one at the start, one after — trying to reach each other across time.*

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| | |
|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 3 — SELF PAST, SELF NOW, THE SUBSTANCE |
| Core theme | Identity / transformation / what we owe ourselves |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| SELF PAST | Worn jacket, slouched posture, hands restless | Someone who recognizes early-stage using in themselves — or who can play naivety with honesty |
| SELF NOW | Same jacket worn differently — upright, sleeves rolled, hands still | Someone with time in recovery who can hold two states simultaneously |
| THE SUBSTANCE | Something carried — a bottle, a bag, a box. Never set down. | The most physically confident person in the room. The Substance is charming, not scary. |

**DIRECTOR: This play works best when SELF PAST and SELF NOW are played by the same person who splits — sitting on opposite sides of the stage and crossing to speak. If two people play the roles, they should dress identically.**

## PART ONE: Before Everything Changed [ 5 min ]

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### SCENE 1 The Day It Started Feeling Normal [ ~2 min ]

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*[ A single chair. SELF PAST sits. THE SUBSTANCE stands behind them, close but not touching. SELF NOW stands at the far edge of the space, watching. ]*

**SELF PAST: I'm doing fine. I want that on record. I am doing completely fine.**

*[ Beat. THE SUBSTANCE leans in, doesn't speak yet. ]*

**SELF PAST: I have a system. I use it on weekends. Sometimes Thursdays. But I have rules. I wrote them down.**

**SELF NOW: You wrote them down and then you lost the paper.**

**SELF PAST: [ looking around, not seeing SELF NOW ] Who said that?**

*[ THE SUBSTANCE puts a hand on SELF PAST's shoulder. SELF PAST visibly relaxes. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:** Nobody. You're fine. You said so yourself.

**SELF PAST:** I'm fine.

**— The first lie that felt completely true —**

### SCENE 2 The Conversation That Didn't Happen [ ~3 min ]

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*[ SELF NOW crosses toward SELF PAST. They almost touch. THE SUBSTANCE moves between them. ]*

**SELF NOW:** I need to tell you something. About what happens next.

**SUBSTANCE:** [ pleasantly, to SELF PAST ] You don't need to hear this.

**SELF PAST:** [ to the air, not quite hearing ] I can't hear you very well.

**SELF NOW:** I know. You couldn't hear me then either. I'm trying anyway.

**SELF PAST:** [ to THE SUBSTANCE ] Is someone there?

**SUBSTANCE:** [ smiling ] It's just the noise. Come on. You've got things to do.

*[ SELF PAST stands. Follows THE SUBSTANCE away from SELF NOW. SELF NOW watches. ]*

**SELF NOW:** The things you have to do. That's what I need to tell you about.

**— The warning that arrived too late — or was it too early? —**

## PART TWO: The Pivot Point [ 5 min ]

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### SCENE 3 The Night the Rules Disappeared [ ~2 min ]

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*[ SELF PAST is now clearly exhausted. THE SUBSTANCE is still there but has stopped being charming — is now just present, obligatory. ]*

**SELF PAST:** I can't remember what the rules were.

**SUBSTANCE:** You don't need rules. You just need this.

**SELF PAST:** I wrote them down.

**SUBSTANCE:** Did you, though? Or did you just think about writing them down?

*[ Beat. SELF PAST can't remember. ]*

**SELF NOW:** [ from across the space ] Three rules. You told me the three rules once. I remember them.

**SELF PAST:** [ looks up, toward the voice this time ] What were they?

**SELF NOW:** Never alone. Never before noon. Never when something important is the next day.

**SELF PAST:** [ quiet ] I've been breaking all three.

**SUBSTANCE:** [ sharply ] They were bad rules.

**— The moment the math became undeniable —**

### SCENE 4 The Conversation That Finally Happens [ ~3 min ]

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*[ THE SUBSTANCE steps back — just slightly. SELF PAST and SELF NOW are closer now. Almost in the same space. ]*

**SELF NOW: I'm not here to tell you what you did wrong.**

**SELF PAST: Then what are you here for?**

**SELF NOW: To tell you that you make it. And to tell you it costs something. And to ask you if you want to know what it costs.**

**SELF PAST: [ long pause ] Does it cost... this?**

*[ SELF PAST gestures toward THE SUBSTANCE without looking at it. ]*

**SELF NOW: Yeah. It costs this.**

**SUBSTANCE: [ to SELF PAST ] You don't have to make any decisions right now.**

**SELF PAST: [ still to SELF NOW ] And after? After it costs this?**

**SELF NOW: I'm standing here. That's what after looks like.**

**— The first real look across time —**

## PART THREE: The Other Side [ 5 min ]

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### SCENE 5 What THE SUBSTANCE Says When It's Losing [ ~2 min ]

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*[ THE SUBSTANCE moves toward SELF NOW now — ignoring SELF PAST. ]*

**SUBSTANCE: You know I'll be here. Whatever you tell them. I'll still be here.**

**SELF NOW: I know.**

**SUBSTANCE: And there will be a Tuesday. Maybe in six months. Maybe in three years. There will be a Tuesday when nothing has gone right, and you'll think of me.**

**SELF NOW: I know that too.**

**SUBSTANCE: [ almost gentle ] Then why are you doing this?**

**SELF NOW: Because I know it now. You used to feel like the only thing that worked. Now I know what you actually cost. Those are different feelings.**

*[ THE SUBSTANCE looks at SELF PAST one more time. ]*

**SUBSTANCE: [ to SELF PAST ] Last chance.**

*[ SELF PAST looks at SELF NOW. Looks at THE SUBSTANCE. Looks back. ]*

**— The choice that was never only one moment —**

### SCENE 6 The Last Conversation [ ~3 min ]

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*[ SELF PAST and SELF NOW stand together now — almost overlapping. THE SUBSTANCE at the edge. ]*

**SELF PAST: What do I do with it? With what I lost. The time.**

**SELF NOW: You carry it. You don't get to not carry it. But it gets lighter.**

**SELF PAST: That's not a good answer.**

**SELF NOW: No. But it's the true one.**

**SELF PAST: [ to THE SUBSTANCE ] Is that true?**

**SUBSTANCE: [ pause, surprising everyone including itself ] Yeah. It's true.**

*[ THE SUBSTANCE sets down whatever it was carrying. First time in the play. ]*

*[ Silence. SELF PAST and SELF NOW look at each other. ]*

**SELF PAST: What do I say to the people I—**

**SELF NOW: Not today. Today you just stay in the room.**

**SELF PAST: Okay.**

**— The smallest possible first step —**

*[ Lights down or facilitator calls: SCENE. ]*

### DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- SELF PAST: what was it like to be told what was coming without being able to change course?
- SELF NOW: what did you want to say that you didn't get to say?
- THE SUBSTANCE: what surprised you about that role? What did it feel like to set down what you were carrying?
- To the audience: when did the conversation feel most true? What moment did you recognize?

PLAY 2

# The Job Interview

*Applying for the life you want — with questions nobody ever asks in real interviews.*

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| | |
|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 4 — APPLICANT, INTERVIEWER, THE PAST (offstage voice), THE FUTURE (silent) |
| Core theme | Aspiration / honesty / what we hide on our resumes |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| APPLICANT | Smart clothes over everyday clothes — the effort visible | Anyone — this role requires emotional exposure but no prior acting skill |
| INTERVIEWER | Clipboard or notepad. Reads from it constantly. Makes notes throughout. | Someone who can be simultaneously professional and ruthless — a Warrior often plays this brilliantly |
| THE PAST | No costume. Sits offstage or behind a curtain. Voice only. | Someone with a strong voice and the courage to say hard things plainly |
| THE FUTURE | Sits opposite THE PAST. Silent throughout. Reacts only. No words. | Someone who can communicate with expression and body language alone |

**DIRECTOR: The INTERVIEWER's job is to ask the questions that real life never asks directly but always requires answering. They are not cruel — they are precise. There is a difference. THE FUTURE watches everything and responds only with face and body — no words at any point. THE PAST speaks only when directly addressed or when the APPLICANT is about to lie.**

## PART ONE: The Pleasantries [ 4 min ]

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### SCENE 1 Tell Me About Yourself [ ~2 min ]

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*[ An office. Two chairs. INTERVIEWER seated, clipboard ready. APPLICANT enters. THE FUTURE is already in the room, sitting in a corner, watching. APPLICANT doesn't notice THE FUTURE at first. ]*

**INTERVIEWER: Please, sit. Thank you for coming in.**

**APPLICANT:** Thank you for seeing me.

**INTERVIEWER:** Of course. So. Tell me about yourself.

**APPLICANT:** [ the prepared answer ] I'm a hard worker, I'm resilient, I've — [ notices THE FUTURE watching, stumbles ] Sorry. I'm — I've been through some things.

**INTERVIEWER:** [ makes a note ] Some things. Yes. We've read your file.

**APPLICANT:** My file.

**INTERVIEWER:** This is a comprehensive interview. We have access to everything.

*[ Beat. APPLICANT looks at THE FUTURE. THE FUTURE nods — slowly, seriously. ]*

**APPLICANT:** Everything.

**INTERVIEWER:** Everything. Shall we begin?

— When 'tell me about yourself' means something real —

### SCENE 2 The Resume Gap [ ~2 min ]

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**INTERVIEWER:** I notice there's a gap here. [ taps clipboard ] About three years.

**APPLICANT:** I was — managing some personal challenges.

**INTERVIEWER:** Managing them.

**APPLICANT:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me what you learned during those three years.

**APPLICANT:** [ pause ] I learned that I had been running on a chemical that wasn't mine. That my brain had a deficit I didn't know how to name. That the thing I was using to fix it was making the deficit worse.

**INTERVIEWER:** [ looks up from clipboard for the first time ] That's quite specific.

**APPLICANT:** You said comprehensive.

*[ THE PAST voice, from offstage: ]*

**THE PAST:** Tell them about the Tuesday in October.

**APPLICANT:** [ tenses ] That's not relevant.

**THE PAST:** The interviewer said everything.

*[ Beat. THE FUTURE leans forward — interested. ]*

— The resume tells what happened. The interview asks why. —

## PART TWO: The Real Questions [ 6 min ]

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### SCENE 3 Why Do You Want This Position? [ ~3 min ]

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**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you want this life?

**APPLICANT:** I'm sorry?

**INTERVIEWER:** The life you're applying for. Why this one? You had a different one. Why did you leave it?

**APPLICANT:** [ long pause ] The other life was killing me.

**INTERVIEWER:** People say that. But you stayed in it for — [ checks clipboard ] seven years.

**APPLICANT:** I didn't know I had somewhere else to apply.

**INTERVIEWER:** And now you do.

**APPLICANT:** Someone showed me the application.

**INTERVIEWER:** Who?

**APPLICANT:** [ looks at THE FUTURE ] I'm not sure yet.

*[ THE FUTURE smiles — just barely. ]*

**INTERVIEWER:** What are your greatest strengths?

**APPLICANT:** I know what rock bottom feels like from the inside. I know it's not the bottom — there's further down. I came back from further down. I know the way back.

**INTERVIEWER:** [ makes note ] And your greatest weakness?

**APPLICANT:** I still have the same brain I had before. The same variants. The same architecture. I can manage it now. But it doesn't change.

— Honesty as a qualification —

### SCENE 4 The Reference Check [ ~3 min ]

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**INTERVIEWER:** We've contacted some references. Your previous employers, as it were.

*[ THE PAST voice: ]*

**THE PAST:** That's me, isn't it.

**INTERVIEWER:** [ to THE PAST, as if on phone ] Yes, hello. We have the applicant here. Can you speak to their character?

**THE PAST:** Their character. [ beat ] They showed up. Even when I made it almost impossible to show up. That counts for something.

**INTERVIEWER:** Any concerns?

**THE PAST:** They still talk to me. Sometimes late at night. I'm not sure that's healthy.

**APPLICANT:** [ to THE PAST ] That's enough.

**THE PAST:** I'm a reference. They asked.

**APPLICANT:** [ to INTERVIEWER ] I'm working on the late-night conversations. I have tools now.

**INTERVIEWER:** [ still writing ] Tools. What kind?

**APPLICANT:** The kind that address the actual chemistry. Not just the behavior.

*[ THE FUTURE stands — first movement of the play. Walks to stand behind the APPLICANT. ]*

**INTERVIEWER:** [ looks at THE FUTURE, then back ] We have one final question.

— When your past writes your reference and your future shows up to vouch for you —

## PART THREE: The Offer [ 5 min ]

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### SCENE 5 Where Do You See Yourself in Five Years? [ ~2 min ]

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**INTERVIEWER:** Where do you see yourself in five years?

**APPLICANT:** [ looks at THE FUTURE standing behind them ] Present. That's the main thing. Present for whatever is happening.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's not very ambitious.

**APPLICANT:** You don't know where I'm coming from.

**INTERVIEWER:** [ sets down clipboard ] No. I don't. [ genuine now ] Tell me.

**APPLICANT:** I spent three years — more — not being present for anything. Physically in the room and completely absent from my life. Five years from now, present, is the most ambitious thing I can imagine.

*[ THE PAST voice, quieter now: ]*

**THE PAST:** That's true.

*[ THE FUTURE places a hand on the APPLICANT's shoulder. APPLICANT straightens. ]*

**— Presence as the ultimate goal —**

## SCENE 6 The Decision [ ~3 min ]

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**INTERVIEWER:** We've reviewed your application. [ looks at THE FUTURE, then THE PAST, then APPLICANT ] I want to be honest with you. You are not the strongest candidate on paper.

**APPLICANT:** I know.

**INTERVIEWER:** There are gaps. There is history. There are — questions about reliability.

**APPLICANT:** I know that too.

**INTERVIEWER:** However.

**APPLICANT:** [ holds breath ]

**INTERVIEWER:** You are the only candidate who told us the truth. Every other applicant told us what we wanted to hear. You told us what was actually true. In our experience — [ sets clipboard down entirely ] that is the only thing that predicts success in this position.

**APPLICANT:** What is the position exactly?

**INTERVIEWER:** [ pause ] Your life. The one you're applying for.

*[ Beat. APPLICANT looks at THE FUTURE. THE FUTURE nods. ]*

**APPLICANT:** When do I start?

**INTERVIEWER:** You already did. When you walked in here.

**— The interview was the job —**

*[ Lights down or SCENE. ]*

### DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- APPLICANT: what was hardest to say in the interview? What surprised you about saying it out loud?
- INTERVIEWER: how did it feel to ask the real questions instead of the polite ones?
- THE PAST: what did it feel like to be a reference — to speak about someone's character from that position?
- THE FUTURE: you said nothing. What were you communicating? What did you want to say?
- To the room: what question from this interview do you wish someone had actually asked you?

PLAY 3

# The Museum of Choices

*Every exhibit is a decision. The guide explains each one without judgment. The visitor decides what to take home.*

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| | |
|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 4 — THE VISITOR, THE GUIDE, EXHIBIT 1 (living), EXHIBIT 2 (living) |
| Core theme | Accountability without shame / the architecture of decision |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| THE VISITOR | Comfortable clothes. Slightly lost expression. Carries nothing. | Someone who can hold vulnerability and wry humor simultaneously |
| THE GUIDE | Something professional — lanyard, clipboard, official manner. Warm but precise. | Someone who naturally explains things clearly without judgment |
| EXHIBIT 1 — THE FIRST USE | Frozen in place until spoken to. Then fully alive. | Someone who can capture the specific energy of early use — the curiosity, the relief |
| EXHIBIT 2 — THE MAINTENANCE PERIOD | Frozen. Tired when alive. | Someone who can convey exhaustion and the appearance of normalcy simultaneously |

**DIRECTOR: The EXHIBITS freeze completely between scenes — they are objects, displays, until the VISITOR approaches. When the VISITOR walks away, they freeze again. THE GUIDE maintains the tour with professional detachment that keeps cracking into genuine care.**

## PART ONE: The Orientation [ 3 min ]

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### SCENE 1 Welcome to the Museum [ ~1.5 min ]

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*[ An empty space. Exhibits (two people) stand frozen in different parts of the room. THE GUIDE waits at the entrance. THE VISITOR enters, looks around uncertainly. ]*

**GUIDE: Welcome. You've been expected.**

**VISITOR: I didn't make a reservation.**

**GUIDE:** No one does. Please, follow me.

**VISITOR:** [ looking at the frozen EXHIBITS ] Are those... people?

**GUIDE:** Each exhibit represents a choice. The exhibit takes human form because choices don't happen in the abstract — they happen in bodies, in moments, with everything else going on at the time.

**VISITOR:** I don't remember agreeing to this.

**GUIDE:** No one does. The museum is yours regardless.
— Your choices are always already on display — whether you tour them or not —

### SCENE 2 The Museum Rules [ ~1.5 min ]

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**GUIDE:** Three rules. Rule one: you may touch the exhibits. Rule two: the exhibits will speak when you approach but they cannot change what they already did. Rule three: you may take one thing from each exhibit when you leave.

**VISITOR:** Take something? From a museum?

**GUIDE:** What you learn from a choice belongs to you. That's the policy.

**VISITOR:** [ looking at EXHIBIT 1 ] What is that one?

**GUIDE:** That is the first time.

**VISITOR:** [ going still ] I don't know if I want to see that.

**GUIDE:** That's why it's in the museum. The things we don't want to see are the ones most worth displaying.
— The things we don't want to examine have the most to teach —

## PART TWO: The Exhibits [ 8 min ]

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### SCENE 3 Exhibit 1 — The First Time [ ~4 min ]

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*[ THE VISITOR approaches EXHIBIT 1. As soon as they are within arm's reach, EXHIBIT 1 comes alive — mid-action, in the middle of something that felt exciting. ]*

**EXHIBIT 1:** [ surprised, genuine ] Oh. You came.

**VISITOR:** I didn't think you'd remember me.

**EXHIBIT 1:** I'm literally made of you remembering me. Of course I remember.

**VISITOR:** Why did you feel so —

**EXHIBIT 1:** Right? [ completing the sentence ] Because for your specific nervous system, that specific compound produced the first experience of adequate neurochemistry you had ever had. You weren't getting high. You were getting normal.

*[ THE GUIDE speaks quietly from a distance: ]*

**GUIDE:** The guide note on this exhibit: the visitor's COMT variant meant their dopamine cleared faster than it could register. For the first time, the signal lasted long enough to feel like feeling.

**VISITOR:** I didn't know that then.

**EXHIBIT 1:** Nobody told you. If someone had told you — if someone had said 'your brain has a specific deficit and this is why this works so well for you and this is what it will cost' — what would you have done?

**VISITOR:** [ long pause ] I don't know.

**EXHIBIT 1:** That's the honest answer.

**VISITOR:** What do I take from you?

**EXHIBIT 1:** The knowledge that the need was real. The solution was wrong. The need was real.

*[ EXHIBIT 1 freezes. THE VISITOR stands with that. ]*

**— The need was real —**

### SCENE 4 Exhibit 2 — The Maintenance Period [ ~4 min ]

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*[ THE VISITOR crosses to EXHIBIT 2. EXHIBIT 2 unfreezes — immediately exhausted, performing normalcy. ]*

**EXHIBIT 2:** [ automatic ] I'm fine. Everything is fine.

**VISITOR:** I know that voice.

**EXHIBIT 2:** [ drops the performance slightly ] Yeah. That's your voice.

**VISITOR:** What are you doing?

**EXHIBIT 2:** Managing. I'm managing everything. I have a system — [ trails off ] I had a system.

**GUIDE:** [ from distance ] Guide note: during the maintenance period the visitor was spending approximately forty percent of their cognitive resources on the logistics of the habit. That forty percent is what wasn't available for the rest of their life.

**VISITOR:** Forty percent.

**EXHIBIT 2:** [ quietly ] I was so tired. All the time. And I kept telling everyone I was fine.

**VISITOR:** Were you scared?

**EXHIBIT 2:** I was terrified. But being terrified meant I had to admit something was wrong. And if something was wrong, I had to — I didn't know what came after that.

**VISITOR:** I know what comes after that.

**EXHIBIT 2:** [ looks up, first real look ] Do you?

**VISITOR:** This. [ gestures to the museum ] Among other things. This comes after that.

*[ Beat. EXHIBIT 2 almost smiles. ]*

**EXHIBIT 2:** What do you take from me?

**VISITOR:** The forty percent. I want the forty percent back.

**EXHIBIT 2:** [ freeze — but before freezing, quietly ] You already have it.

**— The resources were always there — allocated elsewhere —**

## PART THREE: The Gift Shop [ 4 min ]

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### SCENE 5 The Exit Interview [ ~2 min ]

*[ THE VISITOR stands with THE GUIDE at the exit. Both EXHIBITS are frozen behind them. ]*

**GUIDE: How was the tour?**

**VISITOR: I expected it to be worse.**

**GUIDE: Most visitors do.**

**VISITOR: I thought it would be — accusatory.**

**GUIDE: The museum doesn't accuse. It displays. Accusation requires a judgment about what you should have done differently. The museum only shows what happened and why. The why makes the what more understandable.**

**VISITOR: Is there more? Are there more exhibits?**

**GUIDE: The museum is always being added to. That is the nature of a life in progress.**

**— A life in progress is a museum under construction —**

## SCENE 6 What You Carry Out [ ~2 min ]

**GUIDE: Before you go — what are you taking?**

**VISITOR: From the first exhibit: the need was real.**

**GUIDE: Yes.**

**VISITOR: From the second: the forty percent. The understanding that I wasn't failing at life. I was running life on sixty percent capacity because the rest was elsewhere.**

**GUIDE: Good.**

**VISITOR: Are those the right things to take?**

**GUIDE: There are no wrong things to take. The museum exists for what you need from it.**

**VISITOR: [ at the exit, turning back ] Do I have to come back?**

**GUIDE: [ pause ] You will come back. Whether you have to is a different question.**

**VISITOR: And what do you do when you're not running tours?**

**GUIDE: [ beat, honest ] I wait. There is always a visitor due.**

**— We return to our choices whether we intend to or not —**

*[ SCENE. ]*

### DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- THE VISITOR: what exhibit would you add to your museum that wasn't in this play?
- THE GUIDE: what is it like to explain choices without judging them?
- EXHIBITS: what did it feel like to be frozen — to be looked at, examined, approached?
- To the room: what would you take from your own museum of choices?

PLAY 4

# The Party

*Everyone at the party is playing who they used to be. One person walks in as who they are now. Watch what happens.*

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|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 5+ — THE NEWCOMER, THE HOST, OLD FRIEND, THE GHOST, plus ensemble |
| Core theme | Identity / who we were vs. who we are / the cost of fitting in |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| THE NEWCOMER | Clean, slightly overdressed, slightly uncomfortable | Someone in established recovery — the contrast between them and the room must be visible |
| THE HOST | Loud, expansive, holding a drink (can be juice) that they never put down | A natural performer — this is the party animal role done with full commitment |
| OLD FRIEND | Warm but out of sync with THE NEWCOMER's current reality | Someone who can play genuine affection plus genuine confusion simultaneously |
| THE GHOST | Dressed exactly like THE NEWCOMER but in worn, tired clothes. Follows THE NEWCOMER everywhere. Only THE NEWCOMER can see them. | The most subtle acting role — present in every scene, communicates without disrupting |
| ENSEMBLE | Other party guests — playing the version of themselves they used to be | Everyone else in the room — each person plays one trait of their past self turned up to 11 |

**DIRECTOR: THE GHOST is the NEWCOMER's former self — what they looked like at the height of using. THE GHOST does not speak. THE GHOST mirrors the NEWCOMER's body language but slightly delayed, slightly exaggerated. When THE NEWCOMER feels pulled back, THE GHOST moves closer. When THE NEWCOMER holds their ground, THE GHOST fades back.**

## PART ONE: The Arrival [ 4 min ]

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### SCENE 1  Walking In  [ ~2 min ]

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*[ A party in full swing. ENSEMBLE talks, laughs, performs. THE HOST center stage, holding court. THE NEWCOMER enters. THE GHOST is immediately beside them. Nobody else sees THE GHOST. ]*

**HOST:  [ seeing NEWCOMER, genuine delight ] You CAME! I didn't think you'd come!**

**NEWCOMER:  I almost didn't.**

**HOST:  [ pulling NEWCOMER in ] Everyone, look — they're HERE!**

*[ ENSEMBLE reacts — warmly, loudly, in the mode of the party. ]*

**NEWCOMER:  [ to themselves, noticing THE GHOST beside them ] Don't start.**

*[ THE GHOST raises an eyebrow. Says nothing. ]*

**HOST:  You look different. Good different. What did you do?**

**NEWCOMER:  I stopped doing some things.**

**HOST:  [ not quite registering ] Well you look GREAT. Come in, come in — you want something?**

*[ THE HOST gestures to the drink table. THE GHOST leans toward it slightly. ]*

**NEWCOMER:  [ to THE GHOST, low ] Shut up. [ to HOST ] Water's great. Thank you.**

**— The first test: the drink offer —**

### SCENE 2  Playing the Old Version  [ ~2 min ]

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*[ OLD FRIEND finds THE NEWCOMER. Genuine warmth. But they keep addressing a version that isn't there anymore. ]*

**OLD FRIEND:  It's SO good to see you! You remember that night — [ launches into a story from the using days ]**

*[ THE NEWCOMER listens. THE GHOST mimics the physical posture of THE NEWCOMER during that story — the excitement, the expansiveness. ]*

**NEWCOMER:  [ not laughing as expected ] I remember it.**

**OLD FRIEND:  [ slight beat, pushing through ] Right? And then you— [ continues story ]**

**NEWCOMER:  [ quietly ] I was really sick that night. I didn't realize it then.**

**OLD FRIEND:  [ confused ] Sick? You were hilarious.**

**NEWCOMER:  Yeah.**

*[ A beat of distance between them. THE GHOST fades back slightly. ]*

**— The stories other people tell about you aren't always your stories —**

## PART TWO: The Pressure  [ 6 min ]

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### SCENE 3  Everyone Is Performing  [ ~3 min ]

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*[ THE NEWCOMER moves through the party. Each ENSEMBLE member approaches — each playing their past self. One plays bravado. One plays cool detachment. One plays the person who always knew how to make everything fun. THE NEWCOMER recognizes all of them. ]*

**ENSEMBLE 1:  [ big, performing ] You have to try this — it's incredible.**

**NEWCOMER:** I'm okay.

**ENSEMBLE 2:** [ cool ] Oh come on, one isn't going to—

**NEWCOMER:** I know. I'm good.

*[ THE GHOST gets slightly closer each time. THE NEWCOMER notices. ]*

**NEWCOMER:** [ to THE GHOST, under breath ] They're not doing anything wrong. This is just a party.

*[ THE GHOST looks skeptical. ]*

**NEWCOMER:** [ to THE GHOST ] You don't get to be right just because it's hard.

**ENSEMBLE 3:** [ to NEWCOMER, genuine ] Are you talking to yourself?

**NEWCOMER:** [ caught ] I was just — yeah. Little bit.

**ENSEMBLE 3:** [ laughing ] We missed you, you know. Things are different when you're not around.

**NEWCOMER:** [ touched ] Different how?

**ENSEMBLE 3:** Less. I don't know. Less interesting. You always made things feel bigger.

*[ THE NEWCOMER looks at THE GHOST. THE GHOST looks back. A complicated look. ]*

**— The thing we liked about ourselves was real — even inside the mess —**

### SCENE 4 The Honest Conversation [ ~3 min ]

---

*[ THE NEWCOMER and OLD FRIEND, separated from the party slightly. ]*

**OLD FRIEND:** Can I ask you something?

**NEWCOMER:** Go ahead.

**OLD FRIEND:** Are you okay? Like actually.

**NEWCOMER:** Yeah. Actually.

**OLD FRIEND:** You seem — I don't know. Quiet.

**NEWCOMER:** I am quiet. I wasn't quiet before.

**OLD FRIEND:** I know. You were — [ choosing words ] full.

**NEWCOMER:** I was full of something that wasn't real.

**OLD FRIEND:** [ long pause ] I miss who you were.

**NEWCOMER:** [ careful ] I miss some of that too. I don't miss what it cost.

**OLD FRIEND:** Do you miss me? Do you miss this?

**NEWCOMER:** [ honest ] I miss what this felt like. I don't think I miss what was actually happening.

*[ OLD FRIEND processes this. THE GHOST sits down — for the first time, sits. ]*

**— The difference between missing a feeling and missing a reality —**

## PART THREE: The Leaving [ 5 min ]

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### SCENE 5 The Pull [ ~2 min ]

---

*[ The party is at its peak. THE NEWCOMER alone for a moment. THE GHOST stands beside them, and for the first time speaks — just once. ]*

**THE GHOST:** [ very quiet ] You could just —

**NEWCOMER:** [ turns to face THE GHOST directly for the first time ] No.

**THE GHOST:** [ gentler ] It would feel—

**NEWCOMER:** I know exactly how it would feel. I know the first twenty minutes very well.

**THE GHOST:** [ even gentler ] You're sure?

**NEWCOMER:** [ pause — the real pause ] Yeah. I'm sure.

*[ THE GHOST nods. Steps back. Sits back down. ]*

**— The moment of choice is never dramatic — it's quiet and specific —**

## SCENE 6 The Walk Out [ ~3 min ]

---

**NEWCOMER:** [ finds HOST ] Thank you for having me.

**HOST:** [ surprised ] You're leaving? Already?

**NEWCOMER:** Early morning.

**HOST:** [ genuine, dropping the performance slightly ] You okay?

**NEWCOMER:** [ genuine back ] Yeah. More than I expected.

**HOST:** [ real ] I'm glad you came.

**NEWCOMER:** Me too.

*[ THE NEWCOMER starts to leave. THE GHOST follows at a distance. At the door, THE NEWCOMER turns and looks at THE GHOST. ]*

**NEWCOMER:** [ to THE GHOST ] You can stay if you want.

*[ THE GHOST looks at the party. Looks at THE NEWCOMER. Shakes their head slowly. ]*

*[ THE GHOST exits with THE NEWCOMER. THE PARTY continues behind them. ]*

**— The ghost comes with us — but the direction is ours to choose —**

*[ SCENE. ]*

### DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- THE NEWCOMER: what was the hardest moment to stay in character for? When did it feel most true?
- THE GHOST: you played someone's former self. What did you observe about them from that position?
- OLD FRIEND: what is it like to care about someone and not quite see them anymore?
- To the room: have you been to this party? What did you do?

PLAY 5

# The Handoff

*Two strangers. The same object. Completely different meanings. A conversation that changes both of them.*

---

| | |
|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 3 — STRANGER A, STRANGER B, THE OBJECT (if voiced) |
| Core theme | Perspective / the meanings we assign / connection across difference |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| STRANGER A | Something from a previous life — a jacket, a watch, a book | Someone who can carry grief and dignity simultaneously |
| STRANGER B | Something from a current life — a journal, a phone with music, a plant | Someone with energy and openness |
| THE OBJECT (optional) | The thing both strangers carry — physical prop | If voiced: someone with a quiet, observational presence. If unvoiced: the two actors work with it physically throughout. |

**DIRECTOR: The object can be anything that both actors can physically interact with — a stone, a coin, a photograph, a key. If playing three characters, THE OBJECT can occasionally narrate what it has witnessed being passed between people. If playing two characters, the object is handled, held, set down, picked up — it lives through the actors' relationship to it.**

## PART ONE: The First Meeting [ 4 min ]

---

### SCENE 1 The Same Corner [ ~2 min ]

---

*[ Two people arrive at the same place from different directions. Both are holding something — they don't realize at first they have the same thing. ]*

**STRANGER A: [ notices B ] Sorry — are you waiting for someone?**

**STRANGER B: No. Are you?**

**STRANGER A: I don't know. I come here when I'm not sure what else to do.**

**STRANGER B: [ beat ] Me too.**

*[ They both look at what they're holding. Then at each other. ]*

**STRANGER B: Is that—**

**STRANGER A: Where did you get that?**

**STRANGER B: Someone gave it to me. Years ago. I don't know if they knew what they were giving.**

**STRANGER A: Someone gave it to me too.**

**— The same thing means different things depending on who holds it —**

### SCENE 2 The Stories It Carries [ ~2 min ]

---

**STRANGER B: What does yours mean to you?**

**STRANGER A: [ pause ] It means I was somewhere I shouldn't have been, doing something I shouldn't have done, and this was the thing in my hand when I realized that.**

**STRANGER B: That's specific.**

**STRANGER A: Yours?**

**STRANGER B: Mine means... the first time I woke up and the first thing I felt wasn't dread. I had this in my hand. I don't know why. But that's what it means now.**

**STRANGER A: [ quiet ] Same object.**

**STRANGER B: [ quiet ] Completely different.**

*[ Optional: THE OBJECT, if voiced, speaks: ]*

**THE OBJECT: I have been in many hands. I have meant many things. I do not have a meaning. The hands give me meaning.**

**— Objects are neutral — only our histories make them matter —**

## PART TWO: The Exchange [ 7 min ]

---

### SCENE 3 Trading Perspectives [ ~4 min ]

---

**STRANGER B: Can I ask — what were you doing? When you were somewhere you shouldn't have been?**

**STRANGER A: [ long pause ] Running from something I had a name for but not a solution to.**

**STRANGER B: And the running—?**

**STRANGER A: Made it worse. Obviously. The way running always makes the thing chasing you faster.**

**STRANGER B: What was the solution? Eventually.**

**STRANGER A: Understanding what I was actually running from. Not the symptoms — the source.**

**STRANGER B: For me it was the opposite. I kept trying to get to the source and skipping all the symptoms. I thought if I fixed the big thing the small things would follow.**

**STRANGER A: Did they?**

**STRANGER B:** No. The small things were the big thing. The sleep, the food, the one walk a day. Those were the thing. Not the insight. The practice.

**STRANGER A:** [ recognizing something ] I had to start at the bottom.

**STRANGER B:** I had to give up the top.

— We arrive at the same place from completely different directions —

### SCENE 4 The Difficult Question [ ~3 min ]

---

**STRANGER B:** Do you ever think about going back?

**STRANGER A:** [ honest ] Sometimes. Not to be there. To understand it better. To see if I missed something.

**STRANGER B:** What do you think you missed?

**STRANGER A:** [ thinks for a long time ] I think I missed that it was working. That's the thing nobody says. It was working. For a while it genuinely worked. And then it stopped working and I kept trying to get back to when it worked.

**STRANGER B:** But why did it stop?

**STRANGER A:** Because the dose required to produce the same effect increased faster than I could increase the dose. Eventually the math doesn't work anymore.

**STRANGER B:** [ quiet ] I understand the math.

**STRANGER A:** Most people in this situation do.

— Understanding the mechanism is not the same as forgiving yourself for following it —

## PART THREE: The Trade [ 4 min ]

---

### SCENE 5 What Do You Do With It? [ ~2 min ]

---

**STRANGER A:** What do you do with it? Yours.

**STRANGER B:** I hold it when things get hard. Not as a talisman — I don't believe in that. Just as a physical thing to hold. Something to focus on.

**STRANGER A:** I've been thinking about getting rid of mine.

**STRANGER B:** Why?

**STRANGER A:** Because what it means is a story I'm tired of being inside.

**STRANGER B:** [ long pause ] What would you replace it with?

**STRANGER A:** That's the problem.

**STRANGER B:** [ holds out their object ] Would you want to trade?

*[ Beat. Both hold their objects. Consider. ]*

— The offer to carry a different story —

### SCENE 6 The Decision [ ~2 min ]

---

**STRANGER A:** [ considering ] If I take yours — what does it mean for me?

**STRANGER B:** **What you give it. Same as always.**

**STRANGER A:** **[ considering ] And yours — carrying mine—**

**STRANGER B:** **I'm not carrying it as yours. I'm carrying it as something that was handed to me by someone who was somewhere hard and found a way out. That means something to me.**

*[ They trade. Hold each other's objects. A beat of adjustment. ]*

**STRANGER A:** **[ surprised ] It feels different.**

**STRANGER B:** **Everything feels different when it's new. Then it feels like yours.**

*[ Optional: THE OBJECT voices, one last time: ]*

**THE OBJECT:** **Every hand that holds me changes what I am. This is not unique to me. This is true of everything.**

**— We become what we carry — and we can choose what we carry —**

*[ SCENE. ]*

**DEBRIEF QUESTIONS**

- STRANGER A: what did it feel like to trade? What were you letting go of?
- STRANGER B: what did it feel like to offer your object to someone who needed a different meaning?
- To the room: what is the object in your life right now — the thing that carries meaning you're either holding or need to trade?

PLAY 6

# The Verdict

*You are the prosecutor, the defense, the judge, and the defendant. But your public defender has seventeen other cases and wants to be home by five.*

---

| | |
|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 5 — DEFENDANT, JUDGE, PROSECUTOR, PUBLIC DEFENDER, THE WITNESS |
| Core theme | Accountability / the justice system / what we deserve vs. what we get |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| THE DEFENDANT | Their own regular clothes. Slightly frozen. | The person whose story this is — requires the most vulnerability |
| THE JUDGE | Something on their head — a hat, a folded paper crown. Bangs the table occasionally. | Someone who can hold authority with genuine weariness — this judge has seen everything |
| THE PROSECUTOR | A folder stuffed with papers. Refers to them constantly. | Someone who can be relentless without being mean — the Prosecutor believes in the case |
| THE PUBLIC DEFENDER | Briefcase. Checks their watch repeatedly. Already eating their lunch. | THIS IS THE STAR ROLE — the defender who is technically there for you but obviously isn't |
| THE WITNESS | Called to testify. Could be anyone from the defendant's life. | Someone who can shift between genuine love and genuine frustration in the same speech |

**DIRECTOR: THE PUBLIC DEFENDER is the comic and cathartic center of this play. They are not evil — they are a burned-out system doing the minimum. Every time they speak, they are technically saying the right things while clearly not meaning any of them. The energy in the room will want to laugh at them — let them. And then let the pain of what they represent land after.**

## PART ONE: The Arraignment [ 4 min ]

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### SCENE 1 All Rise [ ~2 min ]

---

*[ A courtroom. JUDGE at center. PROSECUTOR at one table, full of papers, organized. PUBLIC DEFENDER at another table, eating a sandwich, briefcase unopened. DEFENDANT stands. ]*

**JUDGE: This court is now in session. [ to DEFENDANT ] You have been charged with — [ reads from paper ] Chronic self-neglect. Squandering of considerable potential. Failure to ask for help when help was available. And... [ peers at paper ] three counts of believing things would be fine without evidence.**

**DEFENDANT: [ quiet ] Those are the charges?**

**JUDGE: How do you plead?**

*[ PUBLIC DEFENDER leans over, mouth full: ]*

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ whispered, loud ] Not guilty. Just say not guilty. Gets us out of here faster.**

**DEFENDANT: [ to judge ] I... I'm not sure.**

**JUDGE: That's not a plea.**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ sighing, closing sandwich ] Your honor, my client pleads not guilty by reason of — [ checks briefcase, nothing helpful ] complicated circumstances.**

**PROSECUTOR: The people are prepared to show this was not complicated at all.**

**— When your advocate's indifference is more damaging than the charges —**

### SCENE 2 The Defense Strategy [ ~2 min ]

---

*[ PUBLIC DEFENDER pulls DEFENDANT aside. Private conference — conducted at full volume. ]*

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: Okay. Here's what we're going to do. You're going to plead to the lesser charges, take the deal, we're done by lunch.**

**DEFENDANT: What's the lesser charge?**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ checks phone ] Hmm. Negligence. Two years supervised. Done.**

**DEFENDANT: Two years. For what exactly?**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: For — [ finally opens briefcase, shuffles papers ] for... look, they all end up at the same place, okay? Negligence, self-destruction, failure to thrive. It's basically the same charge.**

**DEFENDANT: Those aren't the same thing.**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ looks up from phone ] Do you have a law degree?**

**DEFENDANT: No.**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: Then trust me. I've been doing this for — [ checks watch ] fourteen years. It's all the same.**

**DEFENDANT: I want to fight it.**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ pained sigh ] Of course you do.**

**— The system designed to help you is often the thing that processes you —**

## PART TWO: The Trial [ 7 min ]

---

### SCENE 3 The Prosecution's Case [ ~3 min ]

---

*[ THE PROSECUTOR approaches the center of the room with their folder. ]*

**PROSECUTOR: Your honor — the facts are not in dispute. The defendant had resources. The defendant had warnings. The defendant had — at minimum — three moments in which the path forward was visible. And on each occasion, they chose the path they knew. Not because they were evil. Because the familiar path has a logic to it, even when it leads somewhere terrible.**

**JUDGE: [ to DEFENDANT ] Do you dispute this?**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ before defendant can speak ] We dispute the framing, your honor. The word 'chose' implies—**

**PROSECUTOR: [ cutting in ] I have a witness.**

*[ THE WITNESS takes a stand. ]*

**PROSECUTOR: Tell the court what you saw.**

**THE WITNESS: [ directly to DEFENDANT, not to the court ] I saw someone I loved disappear in front of me. Not all at once. Gradually. Like a light going out one bulb at a time. And every time I tried to say something — I didn't have the words. And you didn't have the ears.**

**DEFENDANT: [ cracking slightly ] I know.**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ to DEFENDANT, low ] Don't say anything. Don't say anything.**

**DEFENDANT: [ to THE WITNESS ] I know.**

**— The testimony that hits hardest comes from people who loved you —**

## SCENE 4 The Defense — Such As It Is [ ~2 min ]

---

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ stands, stretching ] Your honor, the defense would like to call attention to — [ rifling through papers ] the fact that my client's neurochemistry was significantly compromised at the time of the alleged choices, rendering full executive function—**

**PROSECUTOR: Objection. The defense is reading from what appears to be a restaurant menu.**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ looks at paper ] This is — [ squints ] okay, yes, that is a menu. [ puts it away ] The defense asserts that extenuating circumstances exist and asks for leniency.**

**JUDGE: What extenuating circumstances?**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: The defendant was, uh — [ to DEFENDANT, whispered ] help me out here.**

**DEFENDANT: [ standing, no longer waiting for representation ] Your honor. I was running a neurological system that had never been explained to me. I had variants in my COMT and MTHFR genes that created a deficit I was trying to address with the only thing available that worked. I was not stupid. I was not evil. I was undertreated and under-informed and I made decisions based on the information I had.**

*[ Silence. THE JUDGE looks up. Even THE PROSECUTOR pauses. ]*

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ genuinely surprised ] That was... actually pretty good.**

**— Sometimes you have to represent yourself — because no one else will —**

## SCENE 5 The Rebuttal [ ~2 min ]

**PROSECUTOR:** [ genuinely, not aggressively ] The defendant's statement is noted. The people would like to add, however — that the information was available. That people tried to offer it. That there were moments of choosing to not seek what was available.

**DEFENDANT:** [ pause ] Yes.

**PROSECUTOR:** Why?

**DEFENDANT:** Because seeking the information meant admitting I needed it. And admitting I needed it meant admitting what I was doing wasn't working. And admitting that meant—

**PROSECUTOR:** Meant what?

**DEFENDANT:** Starting over. Which was terrifying.

**PROSECUTOR:** [ sets down folder ] Your honor — the prosecution rests. We are not asking for punishment. We are asking for acknowledgment. That is all.

— Acknowledgment is not punishment — but it is not comfortable either —

## PART THREE: The Verdict [ 4 min ]

### SCENE 6 The Ruling [ ~3 min ]

*[ THE JUDGE looks at all parties. Takes off the hat — signal of gravity. ]*

**JUDGE:** I've been doing this for a long time. [ to PUBLIC DEFENDER ] You — I've seen better defense. I've seen considerably better defense from people with significantly less to work with.

**PUBLIC DEFENDER:** [ wounded ] I did my best.

**JUDGE:** You did what the system allowed for. That is not the same thing. [ to PROSECUTOR ] You made your case fairly. [ to THE WITNESS ] You told the truth. That is the hardest thing in this room. [ to DEFENDANT ] You represented yourself when your representation failed you. That is noted.

**DEFENDANT:** What's the verdict?

**JUDGE:** The verdict is — [ long pause ] that you were a person in a system that did not fully account for your specific biology, operating on incomplete information, making decisions that were rational given what you knew, that caused harm, including to yourself. The verdict is: accountable. Not guilty of being broken. Accountable for what comes next.

**DEFENDANT:** That's not — is that a real verdict?

**JUDGE:** It is in this court.

**PUBLIC DEFENDER:** [ genuinely moved, despite himself ] Huh. [ finishes sandwich ] That was actually pretty good.

— Accountability without condemnation — the verdict the real system almost never delivers —

### SCENE 7 After Court [ ~1 min ]

*[ Courtroom clearing. DEFENDANT and PUBLIC DEFENDER alone for a moment. ]*

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ awkward ] For what it's worth. I did read your file. Last night.**

**DEFENDANT: [ surprised ] You did?**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ defensive ] I read everyone's file eventually.**

**DEFENDANT: What did you think?**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER: [ long pause, real ] I thought — you had a harder time than it looks like from the outside. And you're still here. [ checks watch ] I have another client in twenty minutes. But — yeah. You're still here.**

**— The smallest acknowledgment from the most imperfect messenger —**

*[ SCENE. ]*

### DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- DEFENDANT: how did it feel to have the Public Defender? To have to represent yourself? To get that specific verdict?
- PUBLIC DEFENDER: this is a comedy role with real pain in it. What did you discover about what that character represents?
- PROSECUTOR: what was it like to build the case without judgment — to make the argument without making the moral accusation?
- THE WITNESS: what did the testimony cost? What did it feel like to say those things to someone's face?
- THE JUDGE: what was it like to deliver that verdict? Does it feel true to you?
- To the room: have you had a Public Defender — someone who was supposed to be on your side and wasn't really? What was that like?

PLAY 7

# The Letter

*You write to the thing that consumed you. It writes back. What it says might not be what you expect.*

---

| | |
|---|---|
| Running time | 15 minutes |
| Parts | 3 — THE WRITER, THE SUBSTANCE (voiced), THE POSTAL WORKER (narrator/anchor) |
| Core theme | Confrontation / what the substance actually gave / the goodbye that was never said |
| Minimum cast | 3 — scales to full group |

| ROLE | COSTUME / PROP | WHO SHOULD PLAY THIS |
|---|---|---|
| THE WRITER | Writing materials. A letter being composed in real time. | Anyone — this is the most intimate role. Requires someone willing to be genuinely present. |
| THE SUBSTANCE | No costume except total confidence. This substance loves the writer and is honest about it. | The most nuanced role — THE SUBSTANCE is not the villain. It is a relationship that was real. |
| THE POSTAL WORKER | Delivery uniform feel — hat, bag. Delivers letters between parties. Stays professional, occasionally moved. | A grounding presence — slightly outside the drama, responsible for the transitions. |

**DIRECTOR: This play requires the most emotional honesty. THE SUBSTANCE should not be played as a cartoon villain. The relationship between THE WRITER and THE SUBSTANCE was real — the substance provided something genuine, cost something genuine, and the ending is a genuine loss for both parties. The play is a breakup, not a prosecution.**

## PART ONE: The First Letter [ 5 min ]

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### SCENE 1 Dear Cocaine / Dear Alcohol / Dear [Name It] [ ~2 min ]

---

*[ THE WRITER sits, writing. THE POSTAL WORKER stands to the side. THE SUBSTANCE stands elsewhere — not yet in the scene, but present. ]*

**WRITER:** [ writing out loud, composing ] I've been trying to write this for a long time. I've started it maybe a dozen times. I always get to the second paragraph and stop because — [ pause ] because I don't know how to explain that I'm not angry.

**POSTAL WORKER:** [ quietly, to audience ] They've been sitting here for forty minutes. This is the first letter that made it past the first sentence.

**WRITER:** I should be angry. People tell me I should be angry. But when I think about you, what I actually feel is—

*[ THE SUBSTANCE turns and looks at THE WRITER. A long look. ]*

**WRITER:** —I feel like I'm talking about someone I used to love. And that I know it was bad for me. And that both of those things are true at the same time.

— The love was real — that's what makes it hard —

### SCENE 2 What You Gave Me [ ~3 min ]

---

**WRITER:** [ writing ] You gave me — and I need to say this honestly — you gave me the first real relief I had ever felt. That's the thing I'm not supposed to say. But it's true. Before you, I was running at a deficit I couldn't name. With you, the deficit disappeared.

**POSTAL WORKER:** [ to audience ] The letter is getting harder to write now. The pen is moving more slowly.

**WRITER:** You gave me confidence. You gave me the ability to be in rooms I otherwise couldn't be in. You gave me — [ stops ] You gave me a version of myself I liked. Even if it wasn't real.

*[ THE SUBSTANCE moves closer. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:** [ quietly ] It was real.

**WRITER:** [ looks up — seeing THE SUBSTANCE for the first time ] You would say that.

**SUBSTANCE:** I'm saying it because it's true. The version of you that existed with me was real. It was operating with compromised infrastructure and unsustainable inputs — but it was real.

**WRITER:** [ back to letter ] You gave me real things. At a cost I didn't fully understand until it was already paid.

— The gift was genuine — so was the price —

## PART TWO: The Reply [ 6 min ]

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### SCENE 3 The Postal Worker Makes a Delivery [ ~1 min ]

---

*[ THE POSTAL WORKER crosses to THE SUBSTANCE. Hands over an envelope. ]*

**POSTAL WORKER:** Response. From the addressee.

**SUBSTANCE:** [ takes it, pauses ] I didn't know they'd actually send this.

**POSTAL WORKER:** They almost didn't.

### SCENE 4  Dear Writer: A Letter Back  [ ~5 min ]

---

*[ THE SUBSTANCE reads aloud. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading ] Dear — [ looks at WRITER ] I've been waiting for this letter for a long time. You have no idea how long.**

*[ THE WRITER looks up. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading ] I want to tell you some things that nobody else will tell you. First: you were right. I did give you real things. I am not going to pretend otherwise. Your brain had a deficit. I addressed the deficit. That is what I do. That is all I have ever done.**

**WRITER:  [ quiet ] That sounds like an excuse.**

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading ] I'm not making an excuse. I'm explaining a mechanism. There's a difference. You asked why it felt good. That's why it felt good. You deserve to understand the mechanism.**

*[ Pause. THE SUBSTANCE continues. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading ] Second: I made it worse. I know this. I addressed your deficit temporarily and I made the underlying deficit deeper. That is also what I do. I did not hide this from you — the information was available. But I made it very easy to not look.**

**WRITER:  [ harder now ] Yes. You did.**

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading ] Third — and this is the thing I most need you to hear. You were not stupid. You were not weak. You were a person with a specific biology in a specific moment making a rational calculation based on the information available to you. The calculation was right about the short term and catastrophically wrong about the long term. That is not stupidity. That is a missing variable.**

*[ THE WRITER is crying — or nearly. THE POSTAL WORKER quietly moves to stand near them. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading — voice changing, less composed ] Fourth. I miss you too. That is the truth. I don't have a future with you. I know that. You know that. But the relationship was real. What we were to each other was real. The ending is right. The loss is also real.**

**— A clean breakup is still a breakup —**

**SUBSTANCE:  [ reading, finishing ] I won't ask you to come back. I know what it costs you. I know what it costs everyone. I will ask you this: don't let them take away the memory of what worked before it stopped working. You are allowed to remember that it worked. That memory is part of understanding yourself. Don't let them make you ashamed of having needed something.**

**— You are allowed to remember what it gave you —**

## PART THREE: The Goodbye  [ 4 min ]

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### SCENE 5  The Last Exchange  [ ~3 min ]

---

**WRITER:  [ to THE SUBSTANCE, not the letter ] What do I do with the deficit? The original one. The thing you were covering.**

**SUBSTANCE:  You already know. You're doing it.**

**WRITER:  The supplements. The protocols.**

**SUBSTANCE:  The things that address the actual deficit without my side effects. Yes. [ beat ] They're slower.**

**WRITER:  Much slower.**

**SUBSTANCE:  I was very fast. That was most of the problem.**

**WRITER:  [ small laugh despite everything ]**

**SUBSTANCE:  What?**

**WRITER:  You just made me laugh.**

**SUBSTANCE:  I was good at that too.**

**WRITER:  [ quiet ] I know.**

*[ A beat. THE POSTAL WORKER watches. ]*

**SUBSTANCE:  I should go.**

**WRITER:  [ not stopping them ] Yeah.**

**— The goodbye that never happened — happening now —**

## SCENE 6  The Final Letter  [ ~1 min ]

---

*[ THE WRITER takes up the pen again. Writes. Reads aloud. ]*

**WRITER:  [ writing ] I forgive you. Not because what you did was fine. Because I understand now that you were doing exactly what you were built to do. And I was doing exactly what my biology told me to do. We were both following our programming. I'm changing mine. I don't know what you do with yours.**

*[ Folds the letter. Hands it to THE POSTAL WORKER. ]*

**POSTAL WORKER:  [ takes it ] I'll make sure it's delivered.**

**WRITER:  [ to THE SUBSTANCE, who is leaving ] Thank you. For what it's worth. For what it gave me.**

*[ THE SUBSTANCE stops. Doesn't turn around. Nods once. ]*

*[ Leaves. ]*

**— You can say thank you for what something gave you and still be glad it's gone —**

*[ SCENE. ]*

### DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

• THE WRITER: what surprised you about writing — and receiving — those letters?
• THE SUBSTANCE: how did it feel to play the relationship from the other side? To represent something that loved and harmed simultaneously?
• THE POSTAL WORKER: you were the witness to all of it. What did you carry from that position?
• To the room: what would YOUR substance say back to you? What do you wish it would say?
• What are you allowed to remember about what it gave you? What does it mean to hold that memory without going back?